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ABSTRACT

In summarizing findings on the principal's role in the school, this monograph assumes that the principal is a pivotal figure in the school and is the one who most affects the quality of teacher performance and student achievement. The author concludes that the studies reviewed demonstrate that the principal is a key factor in the success of the school. The booklet is divided into eight sections that examine studies related to the principal and (1) diversity versus uniformity in educational goals, (2) traditional versus nontraditional educational values and attitudes, (3) centralization versus decentralization in organizational relationships, (4) directiveness versus supportiveness in leadership behavior, (5) authoritative versus participative decision-making processes, (6) managerial versus instructional tasks as the principal's primary responsibility, (7) programmed versus adaptive approaches to change, and (8) interaction versus insularity in relations with the public. (Author/JM)

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Effective Principal, Effective School

By

James M. Lipham

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Foreword

Over the years, as a reporter, I have never seen a good school with a poor principal or a poor school with a good principal. I have seen unsuccessful schools turned around into successful ones and, regrettably, outstanding schools slide rapidly into decline. In each case, the rise or fall could readily be traced to the quality of the principal.

If the principal's role is so crucial, why have not greater efforts been made over the years, if not to clone, then at least to try to replicate as far as professionally and humanly possible the successful practitioner?

I suspect that such neglect is in part the result of a widespread reluctance to admit the importance of leadership. Ascribing to any one person such extraordinary powers for good or ill smacks of undemocratic elitism. To some who worship at the altar of total egalitarianism it may seem safer to design an elaborate job description, in the hope that any technically qualified administrator will grow into the job, than to rely on more subjective yardsticks of leadership.

The very concept of the principal as school "administrator" often stands in the way of the right choice. To administer an enterprise is to keep it running as smoothly and effectively as possible. This is no small task, and

certainly an essential one. But it is not the top priority. What ultimately makes the difference is leadership. Administration can be learned; leadership is an inherent strength. A principal who is a leader can leave many of the administrative tasks to others; a principal who is an administrator, even a very good one, cannot expect others to lead.

Lest this description be misread as an endorsement of authoritarian martinets, let me quickly add that the ideal principal leads by example, by force of ideas, by devotion to fairness and justice. The principal who presides over faculty meetings like an inept kindergarten teacher over an unhappy brood of tots is not my idea of a leader. The leader principal ought to interpret his or her role by returning to the origin of the title — the Principal Teacher.

This most timely and much-needed publication quotes Robert Benjamin of *The Cincinnati Post:* "Good principals tend to rock the boat." That is also why their success stories are so often shunned by less successful colleagues and by others in the school system who are equally afraid of the power of new ideas and of the old qualities of leadership.

I hope that in the search for and support of good principals this contribution by The National Association of Secondary School Principals will do its share of rocking the boat for the good of effective school leadership.

Fred M. Hechinger
President
New York Times Co.
Foundation, Inc.

Preface

Principals have considerable potential to improve the lives of others. This brief monograph will take a look at what research reveals about the principal as the pivotal figure in a school—the one who most affects the quality of teacher performance and student achievement.

The author acknowledges with appreciation James W. Keefe of the National Association of Secondary School Principals and Jeffrey F. Dunstan, John J. Pedicone, and Robb E. Rankin of the Department of Educational Administration at the University of Wisconsin-Madison for their kind assistance in preparing this paper for publication.

Appreciation is also expressed to John B. Artis, principal of the Skowhegan (Maine) High School; John C. Daresh of the University of Cincinnati; John J. Lane of DePaul University; David A. Squires of Research for Better Schools, Philadelphia, Pa.; Thomas L. Strick, superintendent of the Merrill Area, Wis., Public Schools; Gail L. Thierbach of the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee; and Marvin J. Fruth, Herbert J. Klausmeier, Robert P. Moser, John R. Palmer, Richard A. Rossmiller, and I. Philip Young of the University of Wisconsin-Madison for their critical review and helpful suggestions for improving the manuscript.

We hope that practicing and prospective principals will find this publication helpful in their continuing efforts to provide quality educational leadership.

James M. Lipham
Madison, Wis.

If a school is a vibrant, innovative, child-centered place; if it has a reputation for excellence in teaching; if students are performing to the best of their ability, one can almost always point to the principal's leadership as the key to success (U.S. Senate, 1979).

. . .it takes a unique person to help give a school, first, an image of what it can be and, second, to provide the drive, support, and skills to make that image approximate reality (Blumberg and Greenfield, 1980).

Introduction

While schools make a difference in what students learn, principals make a difference in schools. This is recognized by scholars, researchers, journalists, practitioners, parents, citizens, and even politicians. They have all found that the local school is the key to educational improvement and that the leadership of the principal is crucial to the school's success with students. The principal as head of the school, which is a social system, has great potential to refine or renew its educational program.

In efforts to improve education during the late '60s and early '70s many researchers conducted large-scale statistical studies which found that home and family variables associated with socioeconomic status showed a much higher relationship to student performance than such factors as dollars spent, staff preparation, availability of instructional materials, the school's physical plant, or other factors (18, 5, 43, 11).

Researchers today, however, are emphasizing the examination of specific school processes and behaviors associated with student attitude and achievement. Many (61, 15, 56, 13, 68) have collected information by schools, grouped schools by students' socioeconomic status, and examined administrative and instructional processes in high and low achieving schools within similar socioeconomic categories

to discover what might account for achievement differences (71). These and other recent studies (4, 50, 9, 14, 85, 53) concentrate on the individual school. They utilize qualitative interview and observation techniques as well as quantitative procedures to examine a host of variables—school goals and objectives, attitudes and norms, roles and relationships, and the leadership and instructional behavior of staff and students within the school. Basic to all the studies, however, was the question of why some schools are more effective than others. Among the many variables examined, the leadership of the principal invariably has emerged as a key factor in the success of the school (36).

In providing leadership, principals make decisions about eight impelling issues directly related to their schools' effectiveness. They include:

- Diversity vs. uniformity in educational goals
- Traditional vs. non-traditional values and attitudes
- Centralization vs. decentralization in organizational relationships
- Directiveness vs. supportiveness in leadership behavior
- Authoritative vs. participative decision-making processes
- Managerial vs. instructional tasks to be completed
- Programmed vs. adaptive approaches to change
- Interaction vs. insularity in relations with the public.

Each of these issues is complex; there are no prescriptive solutions. This monograph discusses the substance of these issues and shows how different principals have resolved them.

The Principal and the Goals of the School

Through the years, committees and commissions have summarized, synthesized, and suggested a variety of goals for the American school. Despite this, society continues to place a multitude of conflicting demands on the school. Principals still do not know how much emphasis to place on the intellectual, social, personal, and productive goals of the school. Principals of successful schools, however, have devoted sustained attention to the basic issue of goal diversity vs. uniformity.

When the goals of the school are clear, reasonably uniform, and perceived as important, and when the staff is committed to them, successful schools result. Researchers studying high achieving schools in Michigan concluded:

> Teachers and principals in higher achieving schools express the belief that students can master their academic work, and that they expect to do so, and they are committed to seeing that their students learn to read, and to do mathematics, and other academic work. These teacher and principal expectations are expressed in such a way that the students perceive that they are expected to learn and the school academic norms are recognized as setting a standard of high achievement. These norms and the teachers' commitment are expressed in the instructional activities which absorb most of the school day (Brookover, et al., 1979, p. 145).

A study of 12 London inner-city secondary schools that had relatively similar students and other characteristics but very different outcomes in academic attainment on examinations, student behavior in school, attendance, and delinquency concluded:

> . . . the differences between schools in outcome were systematically related to their characteristics as social institutions. Factors as varied as the degree of academic emphasis, teacher actions in lessons, the availability of incentives and rewards, good conditions for pupils, and the extent to which children were able to take responsibility were all significantly associated with outcome differences between schools. All of these factors were open to modification by the staff, rather than fixed by external constraints (Rutter, et al., 1979, p. 178).

Journalists in a fellowship program at George Washington University's Institute for Educational Leadership during a study of effective schools (14) visited schools across the country that were generally viewed as effective or that had higher student achievements than would ordinarily be expected. They learned that the principal emerges as the one who sets the focus, direction, philosophy, and tone of these schools.

Robert Benjamin of *The Cincinnati Post* observed: "Good principals tend to rock the boat. They forsake the desire to be loved for the hard task of monitoring students' progress. They set achievement goals for their students, and they judge their teachers and themselves by them" (6, p. 102).

Margo Pope of *The Florida Times-Union* stated: "Effective schools have effective leaders. . . . usually described as people who have high expectations for staff and students, are knowledgeable in their jobs and set the tone for their schools" (66, p. 40).

Jane Eisner of *The Virginia-Pilot* suggested: ". . . the history of the school provides almost a textbook example of what is loosely referred to as the 'principal principle': the notion that a strong administration with vision and with the ability to carry out its goals can make an enormous difference in a school" (21, p. 59).

The principal provides leadership in working with the staff and community to translate the generally agreed-upon goals (i.e., an emphasis on academic achievement) into specific objectives and programs in reading, writing, mathematics, etc. Effective principals work closely with school personnel and patrons to select a reasonable number of goals and objectives to be implemented and evaluated each year.

The Principal and Educational Values

Consensus about goals can be reached only if the prevailing ethos, values, beliefs, and attitudes within the school are reasonably congruent and consistent. Traditionally, America's core values have been democracy, individualism, equality of opportunity, and human perfectability; and emanating from these are the secular values that impinge directly on the operation of schools. While the purpose here is not to prescribe a particular set of secular values, there is considerable evidence that effective schools have beliefs and attitudes that guide the behavior of staff and students.

Dealing with the issue of traditional vs. secular values is not easy. The history of American education shows wide swings of the pendulum from an emphasis on such traditional values as moral commitment, work success, future-time orientation, and individual independence, to an emphasis on moral relativism, sociability, present-time orientation, and group conformity. In resolving the issue of traditional vs. non-traditional values, the principal must give attention to differences in staff attitudes about students' ability to learn (4), to the feelings of both staff and students that what they do makes a difference (85), and to the conviction of students that whether their efforts are fairly evaluated and appropriately rewarded spells much of the difference between individual success and failure in the school (59).

The role of the principal in reaching consensus on educational values and giving them meaning in practice is crucial; principals serve simultaneously as values analysts, values modifiers, and values witnesses. As analysts, principals determine the value orientations and perceptions of others; as modifiers, principals plan and implement activities to clarify and develop the values of others; as witnesses, they model and mirror in their behavior a consistent set of values to be emulated.

Some principals have found such techniques as values clarifications, goal and task ranking, and "We Agree" workshops to be helpful starting points for building staff consensus and commitment. Such procedures are particularly powerful because research (1) reveals that most of the major conflicts in a school do not derive from value differences that are "out in the open" and understood, but from those that are "under the table" and misunderstood. Effective principals analyze their own and others' value orientation and work to establish open lines of communication for all school personnel and for the community.

The Principal and Organizational Relationships

A continuing problem is determining the desirable degree of autonomy of the local school vis-a-vis the school district. A similar dilemma is the degree of autonomy required by the teacher in the classroom compared with the needs of the entire school. In their relations with the central office, some principals tend to adopt a "go it alone," "me and my staff," or "beat the system" orientation that surely is as self-defeating as a "roll over and play dead" response. The issue of centralization vs. decentralization in organizational relationships is a crucial concern.

As with most social systems, the school is a structured bureaucracy consisting of hierarchical positions, authority relations, specialized functions, and rules and regulations. Through the years, however, the school has striven to become a more rational bureaucracy.

Organizational theorists (34) and researchers (78, 37, 57) who have examined such structural characteristics of the school as centralization, stratification, and complexity in relation to outcomes like achievement, climate, innovative-

ness, and efficiency generally recognize today that the school is a "loosely-coupled" rather than authoritarian bureaucracy (55, 80, 2) and that there are qualitative and quantitative breaks between the institutional, managerial, and technical levels of the school organization. Hence, the community and school board do not "tell the administration what to do"; neither do principals "tell the teachers how to teach." Similarly, to teach effectively, the teacher must adapt instruction to the needs of individual students (73, 47, 46); and to be effective, the program of the school must be responsive to the needs of the local community (24).

Further complicating the issue of appropriate authority relationships, collective negotiations now require that teachers and other employee groups deal directly with the school board on matters of concern to them. Thus, many principals, as middle managers, feel by-passed and immobilized.

Obviously, no general solution can be provided for the centralization-decentralization issue, since districts and schools differ so widely in size, structure, and other characteristics. The educational enterprise for years to come will continue to be quite centralized, largely because of society's demands for achievement and accountability. Given this anomaly of a loosely-coupled yet highly-controlled environment, how should the principal respond?

First, effective principals recognize and accept the fact that a substantial amount of their time and energy must be expended in dealing with external as well as internal school issues and concerns. The complaint that the principal is never in the building must be weighed against the reality that "time spent downtown" is a wise investment. As head of the school, the principal performs the key linkage function, reaching out to district and other educational resources to improve the school.

Next, successful principals monitor and, if warranted, move to alter the degree to which the basic functions of the school are unnecessarily centralized. Except in unusual school districts, responsibilities for dealing with most issues in finance and business management are centralized in the district office; responsibilities for dealing with student, personnel, and home-school-community relations are de-

centralized and rest with the principal and staff; and responsibilities for dealing with instruction and staff personnel are often quite mixed.

With regard to instruction and personnel, many variations in leadership behavior occur. The principals of some successful schools (9, 85) claim that curricular and instructional autonomy of the local school staff is central to their success. Other studies (86, 54), however, show that state and district assistance to principals represent a powerful, although underutilized, force for educational improvement.

Many principals insist that greater local autonomy is necessary in the personnel functions—recruitment, selection, assignment, development, evaluation, transfer, and termination of teachers and aids. Yet all personnel decisions must be made according to district policies and within the spirit of negotiated professional agreements. Instead of raising "turf" issues, effective principals utilize the human and material resources available within their own schools, districts, and states. Generally, cooperation, rather than competition, is the key to successful leadership in the school.

The Leadership Behavior of the Principal

Strong leadership has been stressed as the key to the success of the school and may insinuate to some a return to the "great person" approach to leadership. Not so. In studies of successful schools, there has been an almost overriding concern with *specific situational factors* and the local behavioral responses of the principal and staff toward them. Thus, the search for effective schools continues to focus on the *behavior-of-the-leader-in-situation*. Without reviving fruitless arguments about whether leaders are born or made, whether some personal traits are more desirable than

others, or whether some situational characteristics predetermine the latitude for leadership, we can observe that organizational vs. personal considerations must continually be balanced in the behavior of the principal.

Leadership styles have been defined in terms of various dimensions: autocratic, democratic, and laissez-faire (83); initiating structure and consideration (35); nomothetic, idiographic, and transactional (29); goal emphasis, work facilitation, support, and interaction facilitation (10); and instrumental, supportive, and participative (40). Regardless of which characteristics are used to describe leadership behavior, today it is generally recognized that the effective principal provides direction to the school while at the same time supporting the efforts of others.

The "assessment center" concept has been recognized in recent years to be one of the most significant techniques for identifying administrative potential. Scores of research studies have demonstrated the concept's effectiveness (38). In a typical center, 12 to 15 candidates for administrative positions are evaluated by trained assessors using group activities, simulated problem solving exercises, and interviews. NASSP's program assesses participants on 12 dimensions:

- Problem Analysis
- Judgment
- Organizational Ability
- Decisiveness
- Leadership
- Sensitivity
- Range of Interests
- Personal Motivation
- Educational Values
- Stress Tolerance
- Oral Communication Skill
- Written Communication Skill.

Several studies of the directive and supportive leadership behavior of principals in effective schools (33,12,86) suggest three guidelines for principals:

1. *Successful schools have principals who are strong leaders* (4, 85).

Call it vision, mission, foresight, or whatever, principals of effective schools typically stress achievement by self and others and actively assume a leadership role (72). Although staff and others today desire a greater degree of decision involvement, they still expect principals to be involved in and accept responsibility for most of the major decisions affecting the total school (79, 54, 81).

2. *Since no one person possesses all of the essential leadership skills, a management team approach seems to be particularly promising for using to advantage the skills of others in the school* (57, 3, 86).

The development of complementary role descriptions for assistant principals, coordinators, department chairpersons, and others ensures that their full leadership potentials will be realized and exercised. Principals of successful schools recognize that leadership, to be effective, must be shared.

3. *Many leadership studies* (22, 33, 44, 60) *indicate that some principals become firmly wedded to a particular leadership style (i.e., directiveness or supportiveness) rather than develop the ability to shift their styles as circumstances warrant.*

Different kinds of leadership behavior, however, are demanded at the several stages of any change process. Effective principals are skilled in exercising both directive and supportive leadership as the situation warrants.

The Principal and the Decision-Making Process

In making educational decisions, the effective principal must pay attention to *what* a decision concerns, *who* should be involved in making it, and *how* the decision is to be made. The *what* of decision making concerns the basic functions of curriculum and instruction, staff personnel, student personnel, finance and business management, and home-school-community relations in various configurations. The *who* can range from the board of education to the students, through the various combinations of administrators, supervisors, specialists, teachers, parents, and citizens. *How* decisions are made can range from a rational, stepwise process to a highly political, personalized one that, even in successful schools, almost defies description (39, 79, 70).

Principals are often called upon to make decisions that are routine (from "above" and from "below" in the organization), ones that are negotiated (as in the teachers' contract), and ones that are original or heuristic (depending on the creativity of the principal). To involve others in decision making, the principal must give attention to both frequency (how often) and extent (at what level) of involvement. Excessive involvement causes frustration ("Why doesn't the principal just decide and leave us alone?"), whereas underinvolvement creates hard feelings ("Why wasn't I consulted?"). The sensitive principal always strives for a condition of equilibrium.

Several principles of administrative decision making arise from recent studies of successful schools (50, 53):

1. The principal must understand thoroughly the dimensions of decision making—whether the process is rational, nonrational, or, even at times irrational. There is considerable evidence that, in effective schools, the principal defines clearly the boundaries of others' involvement, avoiding

giving the impression that they have the power to make decisions when, in fact, they do not (39, 79, 54).

2. Despite the current tendency toward increased involvement, most teachers still feel deprived of meaningful input to decision making (54). Generally, teachers do not wish to usurp the role of administrators to make final decisions. In fact, participative decision making in schools still is seen as rightfully occurring within an authoritative organizational context (79, 54). Teachers, students, parents, and others, however, do wish to move from a level of "no involvement" to one of "providing relevant information" or "suggesting appropriate alternatives." The involvement of others in effective schools does not water down decisions; it renders them more potent.

3. Total group decision making continues to be overutilized in schools (44,12). In the early stages of any change process, when awareness and support are critical, wide participation should be the rule. In later stages (i.e., implementation), participation should be limited because people weary of group meetings devoted to redeciding issues. As one exasperated teacher said: "We've already decided how this should be done, so why don't we just go ahead and do it?" Effective principals recognize the need for situational leadership.

The Principal and the Instructional Program

The improvement of teaching and learning is the foremost function of the principal. The single most important factor in determining the success or failure of a school is the ability of the principal to lead the staff in planning, implementing, and evaluating improvements in the school's curricular, co-curricular, and extracurricular pro-

grams. How much time, effort, and energy is devoted to instructional, as opposed to managerial, responsibilities, however, is crucial. The management functions of the principal are important only as they facilitate and foster improvement in the school's instructional program.

Working with individuals and groups of teachers to improve classroom performance is a demanding job that requires the principal to have a broadly developed set of understandings, skills, and attitudes. There is a vast difference between "knowing about" the instructional program and being intimately involved in its development, implementation, evaluation, and refinement. Studies show that principals of effective schools:

- Are committed to instructional improvement (73, 81, 27, 58);
- Show strong knowledge of and participation in classroom instructional activities (4, 14);
- Monitor the effective use of classroom time (23, 19, 41);
- Engage in effective instructional improvement processes (31, 26, 47, 16, 62);
- Have positive attitudes toward their staff and students (17, 42, 63).

In providing instructional leadership, the principals of successful schools show that they understand and can aid their teachers in carrying out the steps of individualized or personalized educational programming (74, 8, 45, 20, 73):

1. Stating the educational objectives to be attained by the student population of the school;
2. Estimating the range of objectives that may be attainable by subgroups—departments, subjects, classrooms, or other learning units in the school;
3. Pre-assessing the level of achievement, learning style, and motivation level of each student by the use of standardized or criterion-referenced tests, observation schedules, or work samples;
4. Setting instructional objectives for each student to attain over a short period of time and planning and

implementing an instructional program suitable for each student by varying the amount of teacher advisement, the time spent in various instructional activities, the use of equipment, materials and space, and the size and configuration of teaching-learning groups and individual activities;

5. Post-assessing students for their attainment of the pre-set objectives; and
6. If the objectives are mastered, implementing the next sequence in the instructional program, and, if not, providing suitable correctives.

The principal directly assumes responsibility for assuring that the objectives of the school are clarified, understood, and accepted (step one), and provides support for the staff in carrying out the remaining steps.

Whether principals devote time to instructional tasks as opposed to managerial ones probably is not as predetermined as many principals suppose. Several studies of the principal's use of time (84, 53), show that there are considerable opportunities, both formal and informal, for principals to become more directly involved in instruction. Effective principals are skilled in time management and find opportunities to plan cooperatively with teachers, visit and observe classrooms, provide teachers with helpful feedback, and evaluate the progress of both staff and students.

Finally, we must keep in mind that the effective principal appreciates and acknowledges the abilities and efforts of teachers and others. In effective schools, both small and great efforts by staff to do a better job are noticed, mentioned, and, if possible, rewarded. The effective principal, as does the effective teacher, acknowledges appropriately the earned achievements of others (30).

The Principal and Educational Change

Because principals are the key internal change agents, no change of substantial magnitude can occur in any school without their understanding and support (48). A programmed approach to change assumes that many problems can be made more tolerable (if not eliminated) by careful and explicit preprogramming of implementation procedures. This approach specifies objectives, goals, and standard operating procedures; develops plans; and uses monitoring systems. It is most useful when the scope of the change is minor, the technology is certain, the conflict over goals and means is low, the institution is tightly coupled, and the environment is stable.

By contrast, an adaptive approach to change holds that initial plans should be adapted to unfolding events and decisions. It allows for progressive evolution of goals and rules, for learning, and for broad participation. It is most useful when the scope of the change is major, the technology is uncertain, the conflict over goals and means is high, the institution is loosely coupled, and the environment is unstable. Although the adaptive approach more frequently characterizes change in schools, the effective principal is often required to use the programmed approach and must be skilled in utilizing both.

Regardless of the type of change or the approach used, the process of implementing educational change in the local school encompasses five phases (75):

- Perception of the need for a change;
- Commitment to adopt it;
- Change-over to the new program;
- Evaluation and refinement of implementation; and
- Renewal of the program and personnel implementing it.

Appropriate leadership is required of the principal in each of th se phases of implementation.

From the many studies of change in successful schools, several implications can be derived.

1. The principal, as head of the school, has the primary responsibility for constructive change. The power of the position itself argues for the principal's proposals to be heard and discussed. Certainly, the principal is the major decision maker in the adoption of any educational innovation (32). Except in very small school districts where superintendents and others may collaborate, or in large schools where assistant principals or others must assume certain leadership roles, the primary responsibility for change rests with the principal. Hence, it is not surprising to find that the most frequently cited reason for discontinuing a major change program is that "the principal left" (25).

2. Effective principals acknowledge the dynamic interaction between their own administrative behavior and the various phases of the implementation process. They must not just stay "one step ahead of the group," but must adjust leadership and decision making modes to its changing needs. During the changeover phase, for example, the leadership behavior of the principal must shift from a supportive to a directive style and from a participative to authoritative decision-making mode (3, 12, 86). During the phases of refinement and renewal, the principal's behavior should return to a more supportive and participative mode.

3. Successful principals recognize that essential educational change is a time-consuming process; a major change takes many months, even years (60). Principals must take the time to assist their staff to be adequately informed of the magnitude and complexity of the change program being attempted. They cannot afford to risk, "If we had only known what we were getting outselves into!" They must completely understand any new program to be implemented and share it with all who will be involved. Later, adequate time and attention must be given to planning, implementing, and evaluating. Most major change processes in education probably fail because they are too "rushed." In fact, unsuccessful schools never seem to imple-

ment and evaluate fully any innovation—much less refine and renew it—before jumping onto the next educational bandwagon.

The Principal and the External Environment

The eighth and final issue facing effective principals is determining the degree of interaction vs. insularity in relations of the school with the external environment. This environment locally includes relations with parents, citizens, and other community groups. Beyond the local level it includes relations with intermediate, state, regional, and national educational agencies, colleges and universities, and professional organizations and associations (51). Principals of successful schools strike an appropriate balance in both formal and informal relations with the supportive external environment.

In effective schools, principals know the functions of home-school-community relations (24):

- *Analysis* requires the identification of issues and the participating publics of the school.
- *Communication* implies formal and informal mechanisms for viable two-way flow of information between the school and its relevant subpublics.
- *Involvement* includes both the active participation of parents and citizens in school activities and of students in community learning experiences.
- *Resolution* means conflict management—working with dissenting individuals and groups to reach a working consensus.

Attention to these four functions usually results in strong community support for the programs and personnel of the

school. Conversely, aside from the departure of the principal, "lack of community support" is the most frequently cited reason for the failure of an educational innovation (25).

Beyond the local level, principals of successful schools find ways to reach out and link with the external environment for ideas and programs that can improve the local school. These principals are selective in using the resources of intermediate and state education agencies, regional educational laboratories, research and development centers, educational associations, commercial publishers, private consulting organizations, and other agencies. Research (64) shows that the partnership of local schools with nearby colleges and universities represents the most powerful force for sustained educational improvement. The principal is the chief catalyst for this kind of collaborative activity (49).

Some Needed Initiatives

In recent years, the tendency has been to underestimate the importance of the principalship, focusing more on its intermediary status than on its leadership potential as the head of the ultimate client system to be served—the students in local school. To change this focus, principals need to increase their effectiveness in the eight areas already discussed. They also need to develop long-range plans to strengthen and sustain the leadership role of the principal.

The principalship is a demanding position requiring strong persons. Although massive programs have been funded in curriculum development, specialized personnel training, innovation and change, teaching and learning processes, and knowledge dissemination and utilization, very little has been done to examine and improve performance in the leadership position upon which all of these efforts depend—the school principalship. Yet, ironically, each program that is added increases the already heavy

management and leadership burden of the principal. We need to do better.

Here are some useful alternatives:

1. Current research on the principalship should be expanded, giving serious, sustained attention to both basic and applied research on performance. This research should analyze experimentally the situational, personal, and behavioral dimensions of effective leadership, and study a wide variety of successful schools, as well as the career performance of principals who head such schools.

2. Preservice programs should be upgraded. Currently, candidates for the principalship are largely self-selected, meagerly supported, inadequately prepared, and haphazardly placed. Instead, promising candidates should be identified by assessment center techniques (38, 69), provided financial support during their graduate training, taught the essential concepts and skills, and placed in schools where they can be successful. A national principalship fellowship program, similar to the federal programs for professional development in education, should be developed and funded so that colleges and universities, either competitively or cooperatively, might better prepare future leaders for our schools.

3. Options should be found to help practicing principals improve their daily performance. National, regional, state, and local administrators' associations need increased support for their existing inservice programs for principals. Statewide academies for principals, such as those in Maine and Maryland, should be encouraged. A national academy for practicing school principals might be established. National and international exchange programs for principals should be strengthened. Apprenticeships and internships should be formed. If teacher centers are viable, why not administrator centers? These and many other inservice training options for principals should be explored and implemented.

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